



WRWC RECEIVES LEADERSHIP AWARD

On January 12th, John Mehlhoff, Bureau of Land Management Colorado Associate State Director, presented the State Director's **Excellence through Leadership Award** to the West Region Wildfire Council.

The award recognized service to government through demonstrated leadership performed by any individual, organization or group that is external to BLM Colorado.

The West Region Wildfire Council supports efforts to develop and implement plans to mitigate the threat of catastrophic wildland fire to communities and natural resources in Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel counties. The West Region Wildfire Council also promotes information sharing and collaboration between local communities and state and federal fire managers for fuels management, wildfire suppression, enhancing capability, planning and collaboration.

"The West Region Wildfire Council has made a positive impact in the region through their

innovative approaches to resolving wildfire risks to the community," said BLM Colorado State Director Helen Hankins. "I am pleased to recognize them for their incredible efforts."



Members of the organization completed several projects including leading the effort to complete county-wide Community Wildfire Protection Plans for Delta, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Montrose, Ouray and San Miguel Counties. Additionally,

they have provided funds to assist private land owners with wildfire mitigation projects on more than 70 acres and are working with local fire districts to complete community specific Community Wildfire Protection Plans in the six county region.

To learn more about the West Region Wildfire Council, contact Lilia Colter at 970-249-8407, ext. 125, or visit www.COwildfire.org.

WEST REGION WILDFIRE COUNCIL



As mentioned above, WRWC received the BLM State Director's **Excellence Through Leadership** award at their January meeting. Following

the award presentation, there was a presentation on Fire Adapted Communities and the Ready, Set, Go! program as part of its ongoing monthly educational series. The educational series continues at the February 9th meeting with a panel discussion - Wildfire and Insurance. Insurance agents representing several insurance companies will present their company's perspective on the topic and answering questions from the Council. In March, WRWC will host a presentation about the Firewise Communities USA program.

WRWC has revised its Community Assistance Grant application for 2012. New requirements and changes in the application include:

1. Requirement of three contractor bids
2. Requirement of at least 3 project area pictures
3. 90 day project completion deadline, *unless deadline extension is requested in writing with the application.*
4. In-kind work is no longer an accepted form of documentation towards the required 10% match. The 10% must now be documented through payment to the contractor.

Since beginning the Community Assistance grant program in mid-2011, WRWC assisted 30 landowners with the completion of 47.33 acres of wildfire mitigation. More than 44 acres of treatment are already planned for 2012.

WRWC will be launching its new website (www.COwildfire.org) this month. The website will be a source of information about Council meetings, Community Assistance grants, Community Wildfire Protection Plans, mitigation projects, wildfire education, and other resources.

LEGISLATION

In 2011, the Colorado General Assembly worked on the passage of several bills affecting wildland fire and forest health.

House Bill 11-1317 (HB11-1317): Intergovernmental Cooperative Wildland Fire Mitigation - Concerning a modification of statutory provisions addressing intergovernmental cooperation in connection with wildland fire mitigation. The modification sought to clarify that such provisions were intended to affect land areas used solely for recreational purposes. HB11-1317 states that each local government that owns any land that is located either entirely or partially outside its own boundaries, inside the boundaries of a county, and contains at least fifty percent forest land or land that constitutes a wildland area shall enter into an intergovernmental agreement with the county for the purposes of mitigating forest land or wildland fires affecting contiguous land areas. **Approved 05/27/2011**

Senate Bill 11-110 (SB11-110): County Open Burning Slash Permit Program - Concerning a requirement that Boards of County Commissioners develop an open burning permit system for the purpose of safely disposing of slash. SB11-110 states that the reduction of hazardous fuels on state and private lands is beneficial to the safety of the general public by reducing the threat of unwanted fire and improves the health of Colorado forests. The Colorado Senate determined that a permitting system that informs landowners of safe and effective use of fire as a tool benefits the landowner, county and state; reinforces knowledge of local requirements to increase public awareness and protects health, safety, and welfare; and declares that while the act affects matters of statewide concern, the variability among counties means that a permitting system must take local considerations into account.

SB11-110 guides counties to consult with the Colorado State Forest Service, collaborate with county and local jurisdictions, and consider developing an educational plan to inform private property owners of the benefits, criteria, and required processes for slash pile burning.

SB11-110 exempts broadcast burns conducted within federal and state guidelines and agricultural burns.

Ordinances developed by counties shall include mechanisms to notify individuals with respiratory conditions (if requested) and contiguous landowners of the date, time and location of the slash pile burns.

Approved 04/13/2011

Senate Bill 11-251 (SB11-251): Division of Fire Safety Duties -

Concerning the authority of the Division of Fire Safety within the Department of Public Safety. SB11-251 covers a wide range of authorities for the Division of Fire Safety, but of particular concern to cooperating agencies are the duties related to the volunteer firefighter, first responder, and hazardous materials responder. The Division of Fire Safety is directed to establish a fire service education and training program (providing minimum standards for training and instructors); disseminate rules establishing standards for the firefighter, first responder and hazardous materials responder; and to issue a certificate to any firefighter or rescuer who presents evidence that the minimum certification standards have been met. SB11-251 clarifies that nothing in the Bill shall be construed as creating mandatory certification programs for firefighters, first responders, or hazardous materials responders—or creating a mandatory fire service education and training program. All fire departments in the state have the option of whether or not to participate in such programs. **Approved 05/27/2011**

Senate Bill 11-267 (SB11-267): Forest Health Act of 2011 - Concerning measures to promote forest health, creating the Colorado Forest Biomass Use Work Group, and promoting the creation of sustainable market-based models for active forest management and woody biomass energy development. SB11-267 finds that the Colorado State Forest Service is well-positioned to facilitate state government participation in forest management on federal lands located within Colorado; a collaborative relationship between CSFS, the federal government, and other agencies may restore health, diversity, and resilience of federal forests by increasing information and providing a variety of perspectives on landscape-level determinations; and many communities in the wildfire prone areas have completed Community Wildfire Protection Plans that identify priority areas for hazardous fuels reduction from private state, and federal lands. The Bill also determines that the General Assembly must act to address serious and imminent threats to the health of Colorado's forests, welfare of communities, watersheds, and infrastructure at risk from wildfire. It declares that SB11-267 is necessary to avert these threats by developing technology and markets for woody biomass.

The Bill goes further to outline the expectations of the work group and called for an initial report from the group in November 2011, and a final report that was presented to the General Assembly on January 1, 2012.

INTERAGENCY FIRE ORGANIZATION



In December 2011, the Montrose Interagency Fire Management Unit (MIFMU) Executive Board made the decision to realign personnel within the MIFMU organization along agency lines based on differing agency work emphasis. Fire Dispatch, Fire Business/

Training and Mitigation/Education, however, will continue to work in the same interagency nature they have been.

On January 31st, the Executive Board met with Line Officers and Fire personnel to discuss the transition and needs for an efficient realignment. The Executive Board also delivered the Leaders Intent for the organizational change, "For over twenty years, federal land

management agencies in the MIFMU area have worked in cooperation. We hold ourselves to a high standard of excellence in all aspects of wildland fire and fuels management. We have continually modified the organization to increase efficiency and effectiveness in what we do. Reducing duplication between the agencies, providing clarity on accountability/responsibility and enhancing our safety culture are the primary objectives of our interagency culture..."

A committee of Fire and Management personnel was tasked with providing proposals to the Executive Board for the realignment prior to the upcoming fire season. Once the committee has completed their recommendations, the Executive Board will review the proposals, solidify each agency's organizational structure, and develop a transition plan by the end of February.

WILDLAND FIRE OUTLOOK: FEBRUARY - MAY

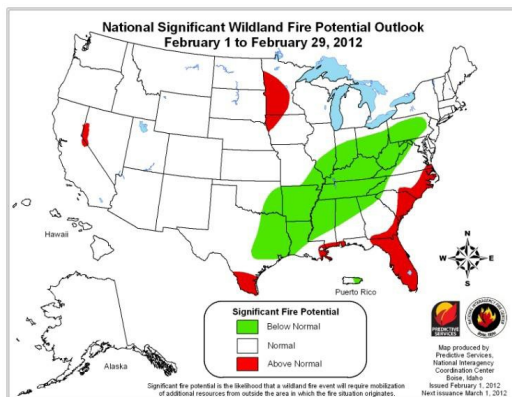


The National Wildland Significant Fire Potential Outlook is developed by the Predictive Services based at the National Interagency Fire Center. The February - May outlook is presented in part below:

La Niña: La Niña remains at near moderate strength and is expected to slowly weaken during the spring months. Classic weather patterns of wet and cold in the northwest and warm and dry in the south are expected, although intensity of these cannot be directly correlated to the strength of La Niña.

Drought: Significantly above normal precipitation fell January across parts of West and North Texas and southern Oklahoma. The Northwest also received significant precipitation. However, large parts of the Southwest and the Plains states remained much below normal. Severe to exceptional drought continues across the south central and far southeastern parts of the U.S. and over parts of the upper Mississippi valley.

Fuel Dryness: Late January and early February have brought a transition to much of the U.S. The southern tier continues to see drier than normal conditions, except across some portions of Texas, where precipitation is moistening fuels even though drought conditions remain prevalent. Also, tree mortality from drought will continue to be problematic. Across much of the west, including the Great Basin fine fuels remain heavy and continuous and are largely dry or capable of quickly drying. Significant fires will be possible with the combination of ignitions and windy conditions. The formerly dry Northwestern quarter of the country has begun to see significant moistening and snowpacks are beginning to increase. In the east the northern tier will largely be near normal seasonal fuel conditions with some dryness lingering across the Great Lakes states. The southeast will continue drier than normal fuels conditions south and east of the Tennessee Valley.



Past Weather and Drought

A ridge over the western North America kept much of the western U.S. dry for the first half of the month while a series of storms formed over the western Gulf states and move toward the Ohio Valley and the Northeast. The pattern changed in mid-January, bringing a series of very moist Pacific storms to the Northwest and the northern Rockies. Above normal precipitation, including a snowstorm brought some much moisture to western and northern Texas and part of southern Oklahoma. The Northwest and northern Rockies, which had virtually no snowpack, received several feet of snow at mid-month, bringing

snowpack close to normal for this time of year. The Ohio Valley continues to see above normal rainfall as the storm track continue to slide across the Midwest. Temperatures were largely above normal across the U.S. with much above normal temperatures over the northern Plains and upper Mississippi Valley. Only the West Coast and much of Florida had below normal temperatures.

Despite the precipitation in the South, much of Texas and Oklahoma remained in severe to exceptional drought as did New Mexico, a large part of Arizona, much of Georgia and South Carolina, southeastern Alabama and northern Florida. Parts of southern Minnesota and northwestern Iowa also remained in severe drought.

Weather and Climate Outlooks

As weak to moderate La Niña conditions persist into the spring, ridging in the eastern U.S. will continue. February temperatures are likely to be above normal across most of the eastern and central U.S. with the highest likelihood in the Southeast. Below normal temperatures are expected in the Northwest and the southern half of Alaska. Precipitation patterns are expected to be typical of late winter La Niña events with the southern third of the country experiencing below normal precipitation. Above normal precipitation is likely to continue for the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes region as well as the far Northwest. For March through May, temperatures are likely to continue above normal for most of the southern half of the country. Below normal temperatures are expected for the Northwest, the northern Rockies and the southern half of Alaska. Precipitation trends are expected to remain below normal for much of the Southwest, the southern and central Plains, and the coastal regions of the Gulf and the lower Atlantic, including Florida. Above normal precipitation is likely along the Canadian border from Washington State to the Great Lakes region.

Rocky Mountain: Normal significant fire potential is forecast over the Rocky Mountain Area during February. An active weather pattern is

anticipated to prevail through at least the early portion of the month over the region with cooler temperatures, occasional precipitation opportunities, and occasional windy periods not unusual for this time of year. Longer range outlooks for February give no indication of any bias towards above or below average precipitation for most of the Area; however, the southwest corner of Colorado has a slight preference toward drier than average conditions. Temperature outlooks indicate a warmer than average

regime over much of Colorado into southeast South Dakota, Nebraska, and especially Kansas.

During the March through May period significant fire potential is expected to become above normal across the lower elevations of southwest Colorado. Long range forecasts point towards average temperatures during the period, except warmer than average in Kansas and central and southern Colorado. A wetter than average weather pattern is predicted over central and western Wyoming, with a drier than average regime stretching from southern Nebraska into the southeast portion of Colorado and western Kansas.





HISTORIC FIRES

In each issue of *MIFMU Monthly*, a list of historic events is included along with the monthly events at the end of the newsletter. The listing of historic events is meant to serve as a reminder of significant dates and events of importance to the wildland fire community. Further, the events illustrate the reality that major wildfires impact the national and global community every month of the year.

The events listed in this month's newsletter all occurred in Australia. A good source of information for learning more about these significant fires is the International Association of Wildland Fire (www.iawfonline.org).

The **Red Tuesday** fires took place on February 1, 1898 in South Gippsland, Victoria. The fires claimed 12 lives, destroyed more than 2,000 buildings and affected approximately 15,000 people - leaving 2,500 homeless.

The **Black Thursday** fires occurred on February 6, 1851 and burned the largest area (approximately 12 million acres) in European-recorded Australian history. More than one million sheep and thousands of cattle were killed - as well as taking the lives of 12 people.

The **Black Tuesday** fires occurred on February 7, 1967. They were the most deadly fires that

Tasmania has ever experienced, leaving 62 people dead, 900 injured and over 7,000 homeless. 110 separate fire fronts burned through some 652,360 acres of land in Southern Tasmania within the space of five hours. Property loss was also extensive with 1,293 homes, and over 1,700 other buildings destroyed. The total damage amounted to \$40 million in 1967 Australian dollars.

The **Ash Wednesday** fires were a series of fires that occurred in southeastern Australia on February 16, 1983. Within twelve hours, more than 180 fires fanned by winds of up to 68 mph caused widespread destruction. The fires became the deadliest fire in Australian history, until the **Black Saturday** fires in 2009. 75 people died - including 17 firefighters. Many fatalities were as a result of conditions caused by a sudden and violent wind change in the evening which rapidly changed the direction and size of the fire front. In many cases, residents fended for themselves as fires broke communications, cut off escape routes and severed utilities. It was also one of Australia's costliest natural disasters. A total of 4,540 insurance claims were paid totaling \$176 million in 1983 Australian dollars with a total estimated cost of well over \$400 million (1983 Australian dollars).



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Look for new updates to come to the MIFMU website in 2012

http://gacc.nifc.gov/rmcc/dispatch_centers/r2mtmc/

February Events

- BLM National Mitigation & Education Conference Call, February 7
- West Region Wildfire Council Meeting, Montrose, February 9
- San Miguel County AOP Meeting, Placerville Fire Station, February 16
- Ouray County AOP Meeting, Ridgway State Park, February 22
- BLM SW District Fuels Meeting, Montrose, February 23

Historic Events

- **Red Tuesday Fires, Victoria, Australia February 1, 1898 - 12 people killed**
- **Black Thursday Fires, Victoria, Australia, February 6, 1851 - 12 people killed**
- **Black Tuesday Fires, Tasmania, Australia, February 7, 1967 - 61 people killed**
- **Ash Wednesday Fires, Victoria, Australia, February 16, 1983 - 75 people killed**